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ABSTRACT

Political language employed in serious inquiry differs systematically from language employed to promote loyalty to authority in respect to syntax; grammatical completeness and complexity; proportion of nouns, verbs, and other parts of speech; and forms of qualification. Formal language entails continuous effort at verfication or falsification and exploration of the innovative possibilities of recombinations of facts and logical premises. Its chief forms in politics are mathematical propositions, a focus upon abstract processes, self-conscious efforts to perceive from the perspectives of others, and some art forms. Public language occurs when people share norms and political loyalties sufficiently that they need not be explicit about premises and meanings. It validates established beliefs and strengthens authority structures. The empirical combination of the two forms of language reinforces the evocative potency of both, but it also creates cognitive confusions of a patterned and recurring kind that inhibit effective political action by the poor. (Author/LL)

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ABSTRACT

Political language employed in serious inquiry differs systematically from language employed to promote loyalty to authority in respect to syntax, grammatical completeness and complexity, proportion of nouns, verbs and other parts of speech, and forms of qualification. Though the two forms (respectively called "formal" and "public" language by Basil Bernstein) are empirically intermixed in daily use, an analysis of their separate functions is necessary for understanding of the link between language and political beliefs.

Formal language entails continuous effort at verification or falsification and exploration of the innovative possibilities of recombinations of facts and logical premises. Its chief forms in politics are mathematical propositions, a focus upon abstract processes, self-conscious efforts to perceive from the perspectives of others, and some art forms. Public language occurs when people sufficiently share norms and political loyalties that they need not be explicit about premises and meanings. It validates established beliefs and strengthens authority structures. Its less obvious forms include: (1) terms classifying people according to their level of competence or merit; (2) terms implicitly defining an in-group whose interests conflict with those of other groups; and (3) ceremonies, rituals, and formalized governmental procedures.

The empirical combination of the two forms of language reinforces the evocative potency of both, but also creates cognitive confusions of a patterned and recurring kind that inhibit effective political action by the poor.

THE LANGUAGE OF INQUIRY AND THE LANGUAGE OF AUTHORITY

Skeptical search for truth and for more adequate solutions to social problems constantly confronts established social norms and authority. The pursuit of knowledge and social solidarity are requisites of both the polity and the individual human being, yet tension between the two needs is an inherent characteristic of politics and of political man.

Basil Bernstein has concluded from careful analysis of language usage that these two modes of political cognition have their respective language forms, which he calls formal language and public language, the former associated with inquiry, skepticism, and experimentation, the latter with acceptance of a stable role set and a fixed structure of authority. Though Bernstein is interested chiefly in class-based language codes, his dichotomy has wider applicability. I use it here to probe the structuring of each form of political cognition, their interactions with each other, and their consequences for political perception and action. Though formal and public language forms are typically combined in actual usage, an understanding of the link between language and perception requires analysis of the separate functions of each form.

FORMAL LANGUAGE

Bernstein ascribes the following characteristics to formal language:

"1. Accurate grammatical order and syntax regulate what is said.

2. Logical modifications and stress are mediated through a grammatically complex sentence construction, especially through the use of a range of conjunctions and relative clauses.

3. Frequent use of prepositions which indicate logical relationships, as well as prepositions which indicate temporal and spatial contiguity.

4. Frequent use of impersonal pronouns, 'it', 'one'.

5. A discriminative selection from a range of adjectives and adverbs.

6. Individual qualification is verbally mediated through the structure and relationships within and between sentences. That is, it is explicit.

7. Expressive symbolism conditioned by this linguistic form distributes affectual support rather than logical meaning to what is said.

8. A language use which points to the possibilities inherent in a complex conceptual hierarchy for the organizing of experience."[1]

Bernstein's last point is a summary statement of the function formal languages serve; the other seven points specify the characteristics of formal languages. Because of these traits, the very employment of a formal language entails an explicit focusing of the attention of user and audience upon the separate elements of propositions: factual allegations and their contingencies, logical relationships and their modifications and stress, individual qualifications, temporal and spatial relationships, and the expression of affect. An explicit, self-conscious focus upon these elements inevitably entails two critical mental processes that the employment of a public language discourages: (1) continuous effort at verification or falsification of both factual and logical propositions and a search for more adequate propositions; (2) continuous effort to explore the innovative possibilities of recombinations of facts, premises, inferences, and associated affect; that is, experimentation with cognitive structures. Twentieth-century concern with the irrational and the nonrational has led to serious

underestimation of the functions of formal languages, especially in the formulation of public policies and in mass response to policies.

Mathematical propositions are manifestly close to a pure case of a formal language. Attention is focused upon logical relationships and their modifications. This is so because numbers are manifestly abstractions from the content of propositions, abstractions that leave behind virtually all of the content that might identify the observer with particular beliefs and perceptions. Abstraction would seem to be a critical characteristic of a formal language.[2]

Another, less obvious characteristic of mathematical language is also critical and helps us identify other modes of formal language. The analyst is self-consciously injecting himself into his observations and reasoning. In pursuing his calculations he is aware that he is testing the possibilities of his mind: aware that the cognitive structures he builds are his own doing, not objective fact.[3] This form of awareness, inherent in formal languages, is absent, and even regarded as contaminating, in public languages, as we shall see shortly.

If these are the characteristics and the functions of formal language, it manifestly takes nonmathematical forms as well, and these also play a critical part in the formulation of governmental policy. First, in the degree that terms designate and analyze processes, as distinguished from the characteristics of persons, problems, or institutions, they are manifestly abstractions and, like numbers, amount to challenges to play with their possibilities through recombinations of elements and a focus upon logical relationships and qualifications. Bernstein speculates that the percentage of nouns to verbs may be higher in a public language than in a formal language and suggests that if this

is true, "the former tends to emphasize things, rather than processes."[4] Political examples of a focus upon processes are common: exploration of the alternative implications of organizing an agency by subject matter area, by professional skill, or by function; analysis of the comparative utilities of indirect or direct regulation of prices and wages; calculation of the optimal degree of centralization of a governmental function. Each such analysis is typically less formal, because less abstract, than a wholly mathematical calculation; but the degree of abstraction is sufficient that the analysis can be largely formal and somewhat independent of the "things" to which it will eventually be applied. Cognitive structures are built upon calculations with such terms as: "price increment," "jurisdiction by function," "span of control," and "wage ceiling." That analyses of such processes respecting one policy area are often used as models to suggest their likely consequences in a different area is evidence of a significant degree of formality and abstraction. The possibilities and consequences of alternative bases for organizing a program, different degrees of centralization, and different implications of price rises for demand are applicable to many specific issues.

There is a third kind of formal political language, less commonly employed in an explicit way in public policy analysis, but widely used nonetheless both by citizens and by public officials. It rests upon self-conscious efforts to perceive situations from the perspective of other people whose everyday lives are part of those situations. Ethnomethodologists try to do this systematically, and more formally; but everyone has to try to perceive from others' perspectives in order

to guide his own actions. The police chief who asks himself how a tense crowd will react if he uses force to halt a protest; the welfare administrator who asks himself whether liberalizing a benefit will satisfy a Welfare Rights Organization and whether it will bring punitive legislation from conservatives in the legislature; workers who ask themselves whether a strike will win them popular sympathy or an antiunion backlash--all of these people are probing the experienced worlds of others and making calculations based upon terms that represent abstractions from those worlds. Terms commonly employed in this way include "tension," "mediation," "diversion," "schism," "anger," "ambiguity," "ambivalence," "appeal."

These are especially revealing cases of formal language, for it is by identifying with others, not by objectifying them and separating them from himself, that the observer finds the provisional facts, concepts, and logical links with which he can play and make his calculations. As is true of other kinds of formal language as well, the self-conscious recognition that the play of the observer's mind is giving meaning to what he observes frees him to think imaginatively and abstractly, recombining elements into new cognitive structures and then testing their utility in interpreting events and behavior. The very mode of naming and thinking calls attention to its tentative character, its continuous need for verification and reformulation.

By contrast, terminologies and syntax that separate the observer and his premises from what he is studying tempt him into dogma; for such linguistic forms present what is observed as objective, as "fact" for any reliable observer (that is, any observer who employs the same language and

method). This perspective characterizes the public language of positivist social science. I consider its consequences below.

Art forms constitute still another formal language, one whose critical function in shaping political perceptions is seldom recognized because there is little general awareness of how art conveys information and meaning. Susanne Langer's brilliant analyses of "presentational forms" are eye-opening in this regard, though their categorization as "aesthetic theory" has inhibited appreciation of their wider applications. Langer points out that painting, sculpture, dance, poetry, and music convey information and meaning, but do so through their forms and the relationships among the elements comprising them rather than through the sequential propositions of expository prose. They teach their audiences to see new meanings in formal relationships in space and in time and they provide understanding of emotion and of its relation to form (rather than directly expressing emotion). They constitute a language based upon a high degree of abstraction from reality of such elements as colors, shapes, time intervals (rhythms), images, and concepts. The artist and the audience can play with recombinations of elements and learn something about the potentialities for new patterns, that is, for building original cognitive structures. Plainly, all the characteristics of formal language are here: abstraction, the challenge of recombining forms regardless of their particular content, the self-conscious use of the mind to achieve new possibilities and new meaning.

Presentational forms often inhibit experimentation and the play of the mind rather than freeing them, reinforcing conventional beliefs and acceptance of authority. This certainly is their most common political

function. When they do so, they constitute a public language as Bernstein uses the term, not a formal language. Yet art does sometimes serve as a formal political language, leading people to new insights and to perception of new possibilities. The best political cartoonists, like Daumier and David Levine, puncture conventions and excite their audiences to a search for different perceptions without resort to expository prose. The best of the guerrilla theater of the sixties did the same thing, as good political satire has always done. Political oratory that excites the mind through unexpected evocations--the oratory of Cicero and some of the best of Lincoln, Bryan, and Franklin Roosevelt--can also be classified as art and as formal language in this sense, though it is of course intermingled with exposition and with public language. None of these examples involves recurring, conventional political procedures. These, as we shall see later, do convey information and meaning; but they reinforce existing beliefs and authority structures rather than engendering experimentation and a search for new possibilities.

Liberating political art forms express feeling, as any art does; but the feeling is recognized as springing from the exhilaration of seeking and finding insights and playing with abstractions. Emotion is not confused with logic or perception. In this connection one of Bernstein's observations (point 7) about an inherent characteristic of formal language is pertinent: "Expressive symbolism conditioned by this linguistic form distributes affectual support rather than logical meaning to what is said." Just as a formal language is precise in its statements of fact and of logical relationships, and in distinguishing reasons from conclusions, so it is also explicit in distinguishing affect from meaningful propositions.

Public language, by contrast, encourages its user and his audience to confuse reasons with conclusions and affect with meaning.

To the degree that people use one or another formal language, then, they find gratification in seeking out pertinent data and logical linkages in order to understand and act effectively. Cognitive dissonance and cross pressures are part of the search and are actively sought out rather than avoided. The employment of formal language entails weighing conflicting perspectives, tentatively perceiving objectives and dangers from the vantage point of different social groups, and anticipating the outcomes of alternative strategies, for these processes are a part of free inquiry. To use formal language is to remain aware of the intimate link between how one thinks, what one perceives, and what conclusions are reached; for the terms employed in a formal language keep these elements separate from each other and engender continuous reexamination of the relationships among them.

Obviously, no person could long survive without some use of formal language, and neither could a polity; for problem solving and effective action would be wholly sacrificed to the demands of social unity and authority. But formal language always coexists with public language, which also serves a vital function. It is essential to recognize how the two differ in their characteristics and consequences and how their combination affects political perception and behavior.

PUBLIC LANGUAGE

Bernstein presents the characteristics of public language as follows:

"1. short, grammatically simple, often unfinished sentences, poor syntactical construction with verbal form stressing the active mood,

2. simple and repetitive use of conjunctions (so, then, and because),
3. frequent use of short commands and questions,
4. rigid and limited use of adjectives and adverbs,
5. infrequent use of impersonal pronouns as subjects (one, it),
6. statements are formulated as implicit questions, leading to sympathetic circularity,
7. a statement of fact is often used as both reason and conclusion, that is, the reason and conclusion are confounded to produce categorical statements,
8. the individual selects from a group of idiomatic phrases frequently,
9. symbolism is of a low order of generality,
10. individual qualifications are implicit in the sentence structure."[5]

The last item is critical; as Bernstein believes, it shapes the others. The use of a public language occurs among people who sufficiently share norms that they need not be explicit about premises and meanings. Simple and unfinished sentences, poor syntax, frequent repetition of a small number of idiomatic phrases, little qualification, and reliance on the very incompleteness of exposition to demonstrate implicit understanding between speaker and audience ("sympathetic circularity") all presuppose common norms that the language both reflects and reinforces. The language of Richard Nixon and his associates as heard on the White House tapes perfectly exemplifies the characteristics of a public language.

Rather than abstracting formal elements that can be reordered to yield new possibilities, public language validates established beliefs and strengthens the existing authority structure. It is therefore preeminently the language form governmental regimes and social elites rely upon to demonstrate to mass publics, and to themselves, that the

established structure deserves support; to minimize guilt; and to evoke feelings in support of the polity. By the same token, public language engenders intolerance toward alternatives and toward people identified as hostile to established norms and authorities. Bernstein finds that it "tends to be . . . a 'tough' language," eliciting behavior consonant with the toughness and discouraging verbalization of tender feelings and the opportunities for learning inherent in the verbal expression of tender feelings.[6]

It is important to recognize the many forms public language takes. Exhortations to patriotism and to support for the leader and his regime constitute an obvious form. I focus here upon the less obvious forms.

1. Terms classifying people (individually or in groups) according to the level of their merit, competence, pathology, or authority.

Deserving (or undeserving) poor; superior or subnormal I.Q.; skilled diplomatic negotiator; pre-delinquent; impulsive-hysteric; authoritarian personality; public-spirited businessman. All these terms purport to be descriptive, based upon observations or reliable inference from observations. Yet each one of them takes for granted a great deal that is controversial, unknown, or false when examined closely. That a poor person who is old or sick is deserving, while one who cannot find work or is paid wages below the subsistence level is not, is hardly self-evident. Neither are the meaning of an I.Q. test, the values contributed by a diplomat presented as skilled or experienced, the consequences of labeling people "pre-delinquent," and so on. Such terms classify people according to their alleged merits without calling attention to the complicated and controversial assumptions, inferences, omissions, likelihood of error, and alternative possibilities open to those

who use the terms, that is, without the tentativeness and continuing critical stance toward the mental processes of the observer that are the hallmark of science. Though such categorizations are much closer to dogma than to science, they evoke elaborate cognitive structures in the public that takes the language forms to be precise and scientific. Such classification schemes justify existing status levels in the social order with which those who use them identify themselves; but they purport to be based upon personal qualities: intelligence, skills, moral traits, or health. The manifest lesson of this form of public language is that imprecision and the failure to distinguish among reasons, conclusions, and feeling can characterize language that is grammatical and that purports to be precise. The test does not lie only in whether statements are incomplete in form, but in whether they are incomplete in fact because of the failure to be explicit about what is taken for granted and therefore to keep conclusions tentative and distinct from premises. For that reason Bernstein's focus upon speech forms, though suggestive, fails to go far enough in explicating the distinction between public and formal languages. Yet, there is a formal test for this form of public language; it lies in the unqualified employment of any term that defines the level of merit of a person or group of people. Like all public language, its lexicon varies with the social milieu. The terms "wop," "nigger," and "dink" connote a level of merit while denoting an ethnic or national group. Qualifiers stating the premises of speakers are omitted because they point to what the speakers do not wish to face. The same is true of examples of public language forms used in more educated circles.

Casual references to terms of this sort are very likely the most potent creators of public opinion and of popular biases regarding which people deserve

support and which need to be controlled. Though such cognitions engender support for a great deal of legislation and adjudication, the subtlety and complexity of their generation and functioning leave them largely free of criticism, except among a comparatively small set of critics and scholars.

2. Terms that implicitly define an in-group whose interests conflict with those of other groups.

The White House tapes exemplify this very common form of public language perfectly. The evocations of allies and enemies are implicit and indirect (when they are explicit, as in the formulation of military strategy and tactics, the language is formal, not public), occurring through such phrases as "stonewalling," "the hang-out road," references to the reliability, gullibility, or hostile stance of individuals, and the employment of terms like "loyalty," a word that also appeared more and more frequently in the Lyndon Johnson White House as opposition to Johnson escalated.

Terms of these kinds permeate the everyday language of pressure groups, political party activists, social movement activists, revolutionaries, business rivals, and organized crime, though the particular lexicon naturally varies with the historical period and the cultural milieu. By reinforcing social pressures for loyalty and support and perceptions of a threat from outsiders, such terms continuously create, maintain, and strengthen intergroup hostilities. Their employment by any group, together with the provocative behavior they encourage, also elicits their use by the outsiders they define as adversaries. They create cognitions all the more effectively because, like all public language, they subtly evoke beliefs that are not made explicit and therefore are rarely faced or questioned.

Metaphor and metonymy spread the view that members of the academic world or supporters of George McGovern are "enemies." The very lack of explicit statement encourages the implicit, vague, but strongly felt view that electoral adversaries of Nixon are enemies of the state; to take that for granted as fact itself becomes public evidence of loyalty to the group.

It is, in fact, one of the most significant political characteristics of public languages that their employment in purer and purer form itself becomes a signal of in-group acceptance. Sentences become less and less complete and qualifiers more blatantly omitted as more and more is taken for granted, premises are more often left unquestioned, group ties grow stronger, and outside groups are perceived as more dangerous. As always, linguistic expression and psychological traits reflect and reinforce each other.

3. Presentational forms that justify governmental actions and policies.

Aesthetic and other presentational forms without a vocabulary can constitute a formal language, as noted earlier; but when they are part of the governmental process, they more commonly serve as a public language, reinforcing conventional beliefs and acceptance of the social structure. Ceremonies, settings, and ritualistic procedures are conspicuous in every aspect of the governmental process, though we learn to see them as serving instrumental purposes, not as conveying perceptions and beliefs. Election campaigns, legislative procedures, administrative hearings, judicial proceedings, summit meetings and other diplomatic interactions, and the public speeches and announcements of high officials are all heavily imbued with stylized and ritualistic components that serve to justify policy to mass audiences rather than to formulate substantive policy decisions,

their ostensible purpose. Policy formation is carried out largely in a formal language so intermingled with the stylized forms that participants and audiences typically attribute an instrumental function to the latter as well; yet it is impossible to grasp the full import of governmental procedures without making the analytical distinction. An economist's testimony at a legislative hearing on income maintenance plans is likely to be quite formal in content and may influence policy; but the setting in which he is heard is a presentational form evoking public confidence in the care and fairness of the proceedings. And this is often his only function, for the use of expert witnesses as a "cover" for deals already negotiated is a common legislative device.[7]

The symbolic import of such routine governmental procedures obviously is expression of the public will through balanced weighing of the needs of interested groups, and rational choice based upon expert counsel.[8] The public display that accompanies the routines evokes this reassuring meaning, thereby minimizing the impact of the less reassuring aspects of governmental policy making, about which there is general anxiety: bargaining among powerful groups at the expense of those who are not represented; the inadequacies and biases of experts and authorities; the possibility and actuality of error, injustice, deprivation, and inequality in benefits and in sacrifice.

Manifestly, the presentational forms that permeate the governmental process are not all equally good as art or equally effective in conveying their symbolic import. For a part of their audience the committee hearings conducted by Senator Joseph McCarthy did not legitimize his actions, though for some of the audience they did so. By contrast, the felicitous phrases

of Winston Churchill profoundly deepened the sense of community and the loyalty not only of Britons but of citizens of all the Allied powers in World War II.

THE EMPIRICAL COMBINATION OF FORMAL AND PUBLIC LANGUAGES

Though some political language uses approach a purely formal or a purely public mode, political processes ordinarily are carried on through language that intermingles the two types. Some examples already cited demonstrate that their combination in the same setting reinforces both; for the loyalty to a social structure induced by a public language draws support from its presentation as rational analysis, while the affect stemming from group ties lends added incentive to discover new possibilities through the restructuring of abstracted forms.

The temptation, both for schclars and for laymen, is to pigeonhole individuals as rational or nonrational according to the frequency and sophistication of their conspicuous employment of formal language. Because the two language forms are rarely dissociated from each other in practice, this common form of categorization is still another instance of the problematic consignment of people to different levels of merit and competence, in turn justifying controls over them or their elevation to positions of influence and authority.

We are socialized to ascribe a high degree of formality and rationality to the utterances of educated people, especially if they employ the conventional speech of the upper middle class, and to derogate the conventional speech of the working class and the poor as imprecise, sloppy, and impoverished. This classification scheme accordingly reinforces existing disparities in political influence based upon social class and educational

level. Though Bernstein carefully explains that working-class speech patterns are not a consequence of a limited vocabulary and that a language code is independent of measured intelligence, he does take the position that the impoverished culture of working-class children induces a relatively low level of conceptualization. He concludes that working-class children use a language code that restricts learning and personal development, sensitizing the child to his social structure and to the need for meeeing its demands upon him. The middle-class child, by contrast, learns both a restricted and an "elaborated" language code, the latter enabling him to conceptualize more abstractly and develop in a more autonomous way.[9]

It is doubtful, however, that Bernstein is justified in positing a systematic link between class level on the one hand and verbal deprivation and the ability to use formal language on the other. William Labov's studies of the speech of black children in the urban ghettos seem to demonstrate that these children receive as much verbal stimulation, hear as many well-formed sentences, and participate as fully in a highly verbal culture as do middle-class children. Labov also finds that urban black children acquire the same basic vocabulary and the same capacity for conceptualization and for logic as anyone else who learns to speak and understand English. They do often speak a "nonstandard English," which can create problems for them but in no way inhibits the development of logical thought; for the logic of standard English is indistinguishable from the logic of any nonstandard English dialect by any test yet tried.[10]

It is Bernstein's specification of the linguistic characteristics of public and formal language that is invaluable for the analysis of political language, not because one or the other form characterizes individuals, classes, or other categories, but rather because the distinction enables

us to probe: (1) the consequences for cognition of the intermingling of the two forms; and (2) the political consequences of the problematic but widespread perception that some groups are inhibited in their capacity to reason and otherwise manipulate symbols while others are competent to do so. The second point has already been discussed; it manifestly provides a powerful rationale for controlling people who are already in a deprived position in the social structure and for according broad authority to elites.

The first point is more complicated and more subtle, for the political impact of the intermingling of formal and public language can be discerned only by avoiding the temptation to associate each form with particular classes of people and by examining people's behavior in problematic situations in order to build hypotheses about the structure of their cognitions. In doing so, their self-perceptions and their public reports of their motives and thought processes cannot be taken as conclusive; for these reports are themselves part of the process of rationalizing their actions to themselves and others.

Consider some problematic situations. In tense times urban guerrilla leaders typically make statements that shock the middle class: threats to employ terrorism (often accompanied by action) and to kill opposition leaders, and rhetoric exalting violence. Such language would seem to be close to the modal case of public language. It consists of short, incomplete sentences, confounds reasons and conclusions to produce categorical statements, repeats idiomatic phrases frequently, and relies upon "sympathetic circularity" among adherents of the movement to induce affective support for the social structure the guerrilla groups favor. Yet those who use it frequently display strategic and tactical ability of

a high order, often recognizing and using the strategic potentialities of their public language with great effectiveness. A major function of the blatant use of shocking rhetoric, for example, is to induce their adversaries to overreact and thereby alienate their own potential support. When there is sufficient tension and the language of the contending groups is appropriate, still greater tension and more serious confrontation follow. As this happens, the plans and the appeals of groups trying to bring about detente become less effective. So does the formal language component of the contending groups. There is, then, a systematic link between the escalation of conflict and the possibility for rational calculation through the abstraction and restructuring of formal elements in a problematic situation. With increasing confrontation, the role of public language grows more salient. As it does so, attachment to existing authority structures and to conventional definitions of the situation become more rigid.

Similarly, highly formal language is intermingled with public language when it occurs in a political context. Economists and statisticians calculating the benefits and costs of alternative forms of a negative income tax plan employ formal language that is largely mathematical in its terms and syntax. But the economists differ significantly from their computers in the language mix they employ and in its psychological resonance; that is, they can never keep their language on the purely formal plane. They may justify their calculations, for example, on the ground that a negative income tax scheme more effectively helps the poor and maintains social stability than a plan that vests discretion in administrators to grant or withhold benefits, knowing as they do so that this is a controversial

proposition relying in part upon unstated premises and sympathies and entailing the promotion of a particular authority structure and the rejection of a different one. More generally, their ability to use formal language does not detract from either their capacity or their incentive to use a public language as well. It is often unselfconsciously intermingled with their mathematical and logical calculations, sometimes in inconspicuous adverbs or metaphors.

It is true nonetheless that the second example (a negative income tax) entails a wider range of potential lines of development than the one previously discussed (terrorist confrontation). It is less determinate in the range of courses of action and of language styles that can occur in the future. Opinions are less fixed and less emotional, there is play for a very large number of possible conceptualizations and political compromises, and the economic conditions that form the background of the situation can change in many ways. These characteristics of the problematic situation obviously mean that the formal language component is more central than in the earlier example. It is, then, the characteristics of the situation, not the abilities of the people involved in it, that determine the relative prominence of each language style. This systematic tie is a central fact of politics.

Obviously, some individual differences exist in the capacity to speak and think formally. They may stem from formal training, which can provide particular skills but probably not the general intellectual capacity to think formally. In highly tense situations individuals who prefer formal thinking may play a minor role; and in politically calm situations they may play a major role in searching for solutions to commonly recognized

problems; but individuals who confine themselves largely to either formal or public language are exceptional. They are hardly characteristic of most of the population at any social level, though their very atypicality makes them conspicuous and evokes a categorization scheme that we too easily generalize. If the capacity to use a type of formal language (such as mathematics or logic) is inherently greater in some individuals than in others, it is not characteristic of any social class, though both social science and popular myths frequently inculcate the perception that it is.

ROLES AS DISTINCT FROM HUMAN BEINGS

Though human beings have the potentiality for both forms of language and thought, the roles individuals play during their working day often do not. The most common political situations and organizational settings permit officials, administrators, economists, clinical psychologists, social workers, or other "policymakers" to achieve and hold their positions of authority only so long as they reinforce the norms and the authority structure that are taken for granted within the organization that employs them. When the White House, the congressional agriculture committees, and the Secretary of Agriculture accord higher priority to farmers' economic interests than to those of welfare beneficiaries in administering the surplus commodities program, an Assistant Secretary of Agriculture with jurisdiction over that program is appointed to his post because he accepts that priority, and will predictably resign or be dismissed if his actions reflect the opposite priority. The same is true of lower-level administrative staff members, though if they are low enough, the penalty may be limited to

reversal of their actions and possibly denial of promotions. The capacity to employ a formal language may be severely inhibited by organizational sanctions that are occasionally explicit but typically function subtly through self-selection, selective recruitment, and promotion, and through the pervasive use in an organization of a bureaucratic jargon that evokes "sympathetic circularity" for established norms and values; that is precisely the function of the administrative jargons that unfailingly appear in every bureaucratic organization. Professional role-playing sometimes serves the same purpose.

PROBLEMATIC COGNITION THROUGH THE CONFUSION OF LANGUAGE FORMS

If public or formal language were really a function of individual persons' talents rather than of appropriate situations, misperceptions of political situations would be rare and public language would rarely accomplish its objective of expanding or deepening loyalty to a social structure; for it would be obvious that individuals without any capacity for formal calculation would be propagandizing for group norms whenever they spoke or wrote. There would be no reason for anyone with different norms to take them seriously and every reason to ignore them.

Each form of language performs a distinctive function that an analyst can recognize. But their empirical confusion serves an even more crucial political function. It clouds perception of which policies can be efficacious in achieving desired objectives; for premises, reasons, conclusions, and the affect engendered by widespread fears and hopes are confounded with each other. In this confusion lies a large part of the explanation for a frequent political phenomenon that could not occur if

language and thought were consistently rational: the continuation indefinitely of public support for policies that do not produce the benefits they promise and that are sometimes counterproductive.

NOTES

[1]Basil Bernstein, "A Public Language: Some Sociological Implications of a Linguistic Form," British Journal of Sociology, Vol. X (December 1959): 311-326; footnote on page 312.

[2]For a supportive and intriguing set of hypotheses on this theme, see Susanne K. Langer, Philosophical Sketches (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

[3]Jean Piaget, Structuralism (New York: Basic Books, 1971), pp. 17-36.

[4]Bernstein, A Public Language, p. 313.

[5]Ibid., p. 311.

[6]Ibid., p. 313.

[7]Gilbert Y. Steiner and Samuel K. Gove, Legislative Politics in Illinois (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), ch. 4.

[8]I have analysed these issues in some detail in The Symbolic Uses of Politics (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964), ch. 7.

[9]Cf. Basil Bernstein, Class, Codes and Control: Volume 1; Theoretical Studies Towards a Sociology of Language (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971).

[10]William Labov, "The Logic of Nonstandard English," in Language and Poverty, ed. Frederick Williams (Chicago: Markham, 1970), pp. 153-189.